

# Kudos to Randy Dorn for suing over school-funding reform

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**The lawsuit from the state Superintendent of Public Instruction helps ratchet up pressure on lawmakers to solve Washington's school-funding problem.**

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

*The Seattle Times*

Washington schools chief Randy Dorn has stoked the fire under lawmakers and the governor by filing a lawsuit Tuesday against some of the state's largest school districts over the way they use local tax dollars to pay teacher salaries.

It's too bad that such a move is necessary. But after the state Supreme Court disappointingly put off its next round of sanctions against the state, asking instead for more information, a lawsuit from the state's chief advocate for the state's more than 1 million school children is a welcome escalation. Citizens should also pressure their lawmakers or would-be lawmakers on the campaign trail.

The lawsuit might seem counterintuitive, since those same school districts sued the state almost a decade ago over inadequate dollars going to pay for K-12 education, in what is known as the McCleary decision.

Dorn has been a big cheerleader for school funding since he took office eight years ago. But neither he nor an impatient state Supreme Court have been able to push lawmakers to take the big, expensive leap toward fully paying the cost of basic education with state dollars. Lawmakers need to find at least another \$3 billion to \$4 billion before the 2017-18 school year. Transforming some local levy dollars into state money gets them part of the way. The rest will need to come from another revenue source, such as a capital gains tax.

Dorn's new lawsuit won't finish the job, but when combined with other efforts, it creates more pressure. He is asking the King County Superior Court to establish a firm deadline to stop districts from using local levies for anything related to basic education.

The Supreme Court also must up the ante as soon as possible, because more progress will not happen this summer when lawmakers are focused on the November election. A ruling from the bench after the Sept. 7 McCleary hearing would send the right message.

Parents and kids: You're up next.

Lawmakers must hear from the people who are directly affected by the delay in fixing inequity in the Washington's public school system. It's just not fair that kids in Everett are being taught by teachers who are paid about \$23,000 more than teachers in Wapato. Those kids in Western Washington also have better computers, more modern textbooks and a lower poverty level than the ones in Central Washington.

The Washington Constitution promises the state will provide a uniform system of schools that are amply funded. Yet widespread inequity is the fact.

Money isn't everything. But when 19 percent of third graders in Wapato are passing the statewide math test and 62 percent in Everett are passing that same exam, it's not because Wapato kids are dumber or less motivated. Less than 70 percent of the class of 2014 graduated on time in Wapato, compared to 89 percent in Everett. The numbers would be different if they were getting the same dollars for education in both places.

No more stalling.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Donna Gordon Blankinship, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*